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ABSTRACT

In response to decreased levels of funding and declining enrollments, increased competition, and major technological advances, Allegany Community College, in Maryland, has developed a model for managing organizational change. The model incorporates the following four components for effective transition and change: conceptualization; communication; commitment; and control systems. Conceptualization involves understanding that the different parts of the organization are integrated into a whole and recognizing that change perceived as negative for one area may actually be positive for the college. Cross-college representation on most committees and task forces provides individuals with the opportunity to view change from others' perspectives. The second component, active, two-way communication, is a powerful adjunct to traditional communication and can help make change happen. Effective communication is a prerequisite to changing attitudes and behavior and vital to fundamental organizational change. The third component, the commitment of all personnel to strategic planning and their input in that process, is an integral part of organizational growth and development. Any hope of commitment to change, however, must begin with frank discussion of possible causes of resistance and change. Finally, management systems and support services that are dedicated to managing change and monitoring progress in the change process must be created. Organizational leaders should be sensitive to managing change and deploying resources and expertise to assist in transitions. (TGI)

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EXPLOITING INSTABILITY:

A MODEL FOR MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

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BIOGRAPHY

Debra Frank has served as a Program Coordinator in the Business and Management Division at Allegany Community College in Cumberland, Maryland since 1986. At that time, she developed and continues to coordinate a Hospitality Management curriculum. She earned a Bachelor's degree in Nutrition from the Pennsylvania State University and completed a post-graduate dietetic internship at Shadyside Hospital in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She is a Registered Dietitian and serves as a nutrition and food safety consultant to area health and service agencies, businesses, and WJJB Radio. She is chair of the Faculty Senate and is actively involved in faculty/staff development.

In 1995, she completed a year-long professional certification program through the Institute for Academic Leadership Development sponsored by the National Community College Chair Academy. A special interest that emerged from her work with the Institute was the development of a college-wide strategic planning process.

William Rocks served as the Director of Clinical Education for the Respiratory Therapy Program at Allegany Community College in Cumberland, Maryland from 1984 - 1988. Since 1988, he has been the Program Director for Respiratory Therapy. He earned his Master's degree in Health and Education from Frostburg State University and a Bachelor's degree in General Education from California State College. He receive an AAS in Respiratory Therapy from Columbus Technical Institute and is a Registered Respiratory Therapist. He served as a Maryland Board Member of the American Lung Association and is actively involved in numerous other professional organizations. He is an instructor for Advanced Cardiac Life Support. He was recently elected to the Faculty Senate.

In 1995, he began the year-long professional certification program through the Institute for Academic Leadership Development sponsored by the National Community College Chair Academy.

EXPLOITING INSTABILITY:
A MODEL FOR MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

INTRODUCTION

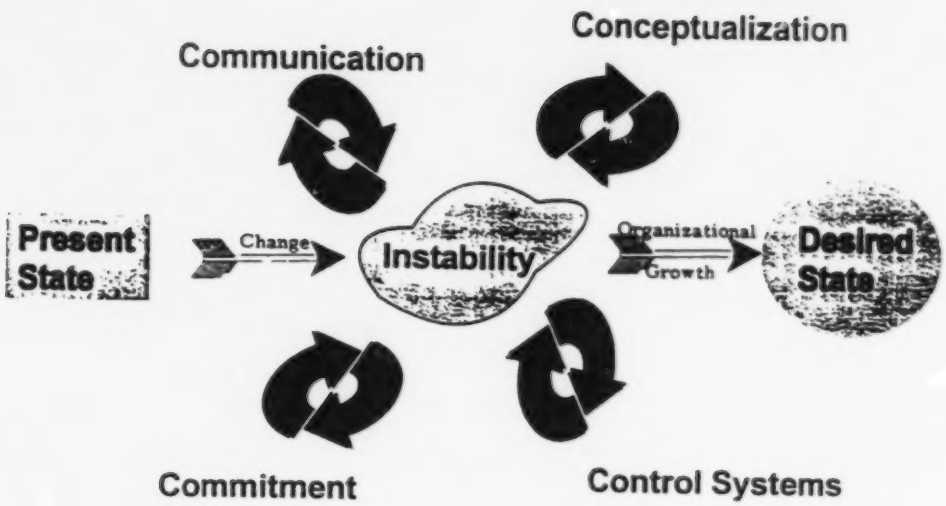
The rapidly changing conditions in today's environment have placed unprecedented demands on organizational leaders. Nowhere is this more apparent than in educational institutions. Tighter funding climates, declining enrollments, increased competition, and major technological advances in product delivery are forcing leaders to examine the very essence of their organizations---their basic purpose, their identity, and their vision. In addition, leaders are recognizing that new directions must be explored while securing commitment from key players. The resultant change may appear to some as a force to be feared; to others, an opportunity to be seized.

Inherent with any major change effort is some degree of instability and unpredictability. A new mind-set is emerging that recognizes this instability as an opportunity for institutional growth and development. It is no longer practical to assume that change will "just happen" with or without the support of stakeholders. Instability from change that is constructively and productively harnessed has both personal and institutional value. It is indeed a paradox that the more uncertain the environment, the more there is a need for a well-designed organization that is energized to thrive in such uncertainty.

A model for managing organizational change is emerging at Allegany Community College in Cumberland, Maryland. It is important to note that this model was not created in a vacuum in anticipation of a major change initiative. It is, rather, a product of "learning while doing". Components of the model that are found to be ineffective are being modified while new techniques are tried. The model itself, then, is part of the change process and is subject to continual review and revision.

As reflected in the following model, an organization passes through a transition state when changing from the present to the desired state. Feeding into and out of the transition should be: conceptualization
communication
commitment
control systems

Should any one of the "Four C's" be neglected, the change process is likely to be ineffective, inefficient, or, worse still, sabotaged.



Model for Managing Organizational Change
(Frank and Rocks)

CONCEPTUALIZATION

Stakeholders must embrace the relationship of the parts to the whole and recognize that change perceived as negative for one area may in fact, be positive for the college. Individuals must be given the opportunities to view change from another's perspective. This is best accomplished through cross-college representation on most committees and task forces. Ad hocracy is frequently employed with special topics or problems, again with cross-college participation as appropriate.

All-college participation in the development of the College Vision, Mission, and Guiding Principles began the shared experience of a singular purpose or direction. This was accomplished with the expertise of a neutral outside consultant who was able to elicit input from many small groups of constituents. Any change initiative must be discussed within the parameters of the Vision, Mission, and Guiding Principles. This helps to move individuals from the narrow scope of their area to the broader perspective of the college.

In an effort to continue to develop conceptual skill, Planning and Advancement Teams were created. All college employees are part of a team that is charged with developing strategic plans and conducting environmental scans. Natural divisions in the administrative side of the college were used to create some of the teams. For example, all Student Services areas were grouped together to form one team with a shared mission. Academic division/programs were also combined for planning and advancement purposes. The result is a sharing of different perspectives and a willingness to consider another's point of view. There is a general sense of "we're in this together" which helps to build strength and unity during a period of instability.

COMMUNICATION

In a fundamental change effort, normal communication practices and procedures have been found to be inadequate. Passive, one-way (downward) communication does not result in emotional commitment to change. Messages must be repeated often so that people hear and remember. A method to measure gaps between messages sent by top management and those received is suggested. Random employee opinion surveys, oral or written, can serve this purpose.

Active, two-way communication is a powerful adjunct to traditional communication and can help make change happen. The Speakeasy, an innovative technique for encouraging active communication, began at ACC several years ago. Every other month, all college administrators meet with individuals who have concerns, questions, or suggestions. Information discussed at the Speakeasy is published in the faculty and staff newsletter. Should someone wish to anonymously express a concern, he/she can present it in writing to an individual identified as the contact person for that building. Attendance at Speakeasy sessions has been good with much positive feedback received.

Other techniques recommended for strengthening active communication practices include: Planning and Advancement Teams; cross-college representation on committees and task forces; broad representation on the President's Council and the Planning Council. The President will meet with randomly selected employees for input on major issues, further bridging potential communication gaps. All full-time faculty and administrative units now have computers and electronic mail is often used to share information. Frequent "Reports to the Stakeholders" from the President keep all informed about anticipated changes and progress in reaching institutional goals.

The importance of developing innovative techniques for enhancing communication cannot be overemphasized. The more that individuals participate in the sharing of information and decision-making, the more likely it

is that they will embrace change initiatives. Effective communication is a prerequisite to changing attitudes and behavior and vital to fundamental change.

COMMITMENT

For stakeholders to share in the commitment to a change effort, certain attitudes and behaviors must be clearly evident in the organization's leaders. Leaders must be aware of signals that they send through behavior and act to align their behavior with the stated commitment. Additionally, leaders must support a "learn while doing" mode by investing in development and education. Top management should recognize that creating a college strategic plan with minimal input from the stakeholders does little to encourage ownership of fundamental change. Strategic planning should, in fact, be considered an integral part of organizational growth and development.

This year ACC has begun a new strategic planning process, enlisting the input of all college employees who are charged with developmentation and implementation of operational plans for their respective area. The plans will be forwarded to the Planning Council for incorporation into a college-wide strategic plan. This process is in direct opposition to that done in many institutions where the college-wide plan is developed first and trickled down to constituents. Faculty and staff have been energized with the prospect of truly having a say in the future direction of the College.

Any hope of commitment to change must begin with examination and discussion of possible causes of resistance to change. Frank and open discussions allow leaders to engage the resistance and constructively deal with it. A series of workshops entitled "Surviving the Whitewater Experience: Change" and "Change....and How to Deal With It" have been offered on campus. The workshops included viewing "The Winds of Change" videotape and activities designed to have participants examine their own response(s) to change and how leaders can overcome resistance. Workshops such as these have proven to be invaluable as they have helped to strengthen the bond between participants and have generated techniques/suggestions for overcoming resistance to change.

CONTROL SYSTEMS

It is wise to create management systems and support services that are dedicated to managing change and monitoring progress in the change process. During the transition state, where all change takes place, resources and experts from across the organization should be identified that will "manage the management". It is critical for top management to pay attention to the process of change in addition to leading the change itself.

Planning and Advancement Teams, previously described, use their expertise to examine external forces and develop proposals for change. As part of the strategic planning process, operational plans are created that identify responsibility and accountability for the completion of tasks. An annual report will be prepared from each department/division that indicates progress in the change process. Key resource people are identified to provide counsel to areas struggling with plan development and/or implementation. Many plans die because of lack of implementation and a mechanism must be in place to assure that this does not happen.

Members of the President's Council, President's Staff, and Planning Council are frequently asked for advice and feedback pertaining to the change process and how it might be improved or strengthened. Organizational leaders are sensitive to managing change and deploying resources and expertise to assist in the transition.

SUMMARY

If today's organizational leader accepts that the future is unknowable, he/she is likely to recognize that stability, harmony, and predictability are not prerequisites for long-term success. Instability and crisis that naturally flow from change should be used in a positive way to generate new perspectives and provoke learning.

As an organization moves from its present state to the desired state, opportunities exist to secure commitment from stakeholders, develop/strengthen communication strategies, enhance conceptualization, and create control systems to monitor the change. These opportunities provide the basis for organizational growth and development and should be embraced.